

The Way of Peace

ISSUE 4

The Violence of Poverty

This is the fourth in a series of eight pamphlets offered by the Columban Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice focusing on peace and active non-violence.

Poverty is a form of violence against the dignity of the human person. It restricts the possibilities for total human development. The Christian belief is that the gifts of the earth come from God and are to be shared for the good of all. We are caretakers of creation, not owners.

We see and experience the effects of poverty, and wonder what we can do about it. Poverty is largely created by unrecognised and unjust structures, what Pope John Paul II calls "the structures of sin".

The Gospel message challenges us to look at what is unjust about the way our world is structured, eg. international trade arrangements, taxation systems, etc., and to work to bring about the change needed for the fair sharing of the earth's resources.

Some myths about Poverty and Hunger:

MYTH 1: There is not enough food to go round.

REALITY: There is enough food in the world to feed all people adequately! Even most 'hungry countries' have enough food for their people; other circumstances often prevent its distribution, eg. transport.

MYTH 2: Nature's to Blame!

REALITY: Food is always available for those who can afford it – starvation in hard times hits only the poorest, when natural events are the final push over the brink.

MYTH 3: There are too many people.

REALITY: Birth rates are falling world wide; nowhere does population density explain hunger. Rapid population growth and hunger are endemic to societies where landownership, jobs, education, healthcare and old-age security are beyond the reach of most people.

MYTH 4: It's a trade-off: the environment or food.

REALITY: Industrial agriculture is degrading soil and undercutting small farmer food production. Land is used to produce 'cash' crops for export instead of food for the people.

MYTH 5: We need large farms.

REALITY: Small farmers achieve four to five times more output per hectare; land reform can increase production.

MYTH 6: The free market can end poverty.

REALITY: The market only works when poor people have enough money to buy.

MYTH 7: All we need is more Aid.

REALITY: Foreign aid needs to be used to empower local people to self sufficiency not to create a mechanism of dependence or undercut local production.

'You will never understand violence or non-violence until you understand the violence to the spirit that happens when you watch your children die of malnutrition.'

Institute for Food & Development Policy

'Promises made (by rich countries) to the poor should be considered particularly binding. The failure to keep commitments in the sphere of aid to developing countries further highlights the injustice of the imbalances existing in the world.'

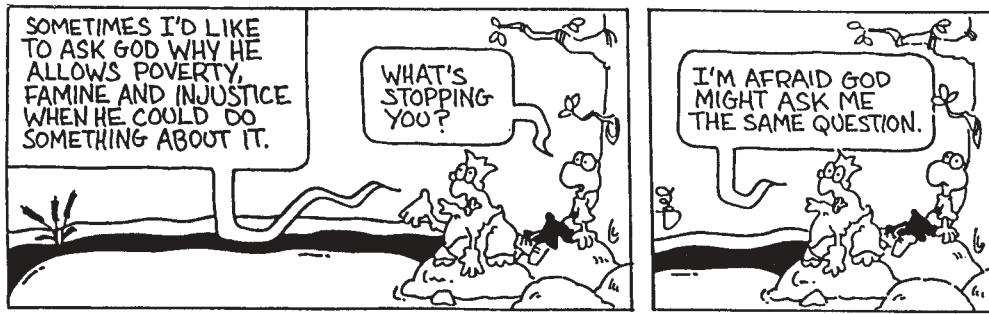
Pope John Paul II,
World Peace Day Message, 2003, #8.

'God created the universe in such a manner that all in common might derive their food from it, and that the earth should also be a property common to all. Why do you reject one who has the same rights over nature as you? It is not from your own goods that you give to the beggar; it is a portion of his own that you are restoring to him. The earth belongs to all.'

St Ambrose (340-397CE)

Excessive economic, social and cultural inequalities among peoples arouse tensions and conflicts, and are a danger to peace.

Pope Paul VI Populorum Progressio, #76



FACT FILE

- ✦ Australia's aid budget stands at 0.25% of Gross National Income. This has dropped from 0.32% in 1995-6. The percentage set by the UN for developed nations is 0.7% (ACFOA Aid Budget Analysis 2001-2).
- ✦ In 1999, 2.8 billion people lived on less than \$2 a day, with 1.2 billion of them barely surviving on the margins of subsistence with less than \$1 a day (UNHDR).
- ✦ 14% of the world's homes have piped water. 1.3 billion people do not have access to clean water (UNHDR).
- ✦ 5 million people die each year from diseases like diarrhoea caused by water contamination (World Watch Institute).
- ✦ The developing world contains 75% of the world's population and earns 10% of the world's income (World Bank).
- ✦ 130 million children have no access to basic primary education (UNICEF).
- ✦ World wide 800 million people are living in chronic hunger;
- 2 billion people are under nourished (World Watch Institute).
- ✦ In one year Australians bought 83,600,000 Tim Tams (Australian grocery industry, '96).
- ✦ 250,000 children go blind each year from lack of vitamin A (UNICEF).
- ✦ 30% of African children and 60% of Sth East Asian children are malnourished (UNICEF).
- ✦ 80% of the world's resources are consumed in the first world (Third World Network).
- ✦ The introduction of the Tobin Tax, a small tax on all international financial exchange transactions, would raise around \$1 trillion each year for development purposes and reverse the current flow of finance from the developing to the developed world (Jubilee Campaign).
- ✦ Every year millions of people are reduced to grinding poverty because up to 40% of their country's income is spent servicing foreign debt.

What can you do?

- ✦ Support the work of Caritas Australia.
- ✦ Write to your local Federal member urging that they argue for an increase in Australia's Aid Budget, at least to UN agreed standard.
- ✦ Get involved in the 'Make Trade Fair Campaign' with Oxfam Community Aid Abroad. Ph. (02) 8204 3900 or (03) 9289 9430 or Freecall 1800 088 110 or check www.maketradefair.com
- ✦ Live simply so that others may simply live!

PROFILE OF A PEACE MAKER

Caritas Australia

Caritas, the Overseas Aid and Development Agency of the Catholic Church in Australia, is connected to Caritas Internationalis, one of the largest organisations in the world which works with the poor. In times of disaster, including war and conflict, Caritas is there to meet the immediate needs of suffering people. But the most important work of Caritas is in facilitating and supporting human development programs which are originated among the poor and landless people themselves. The dedicated and committed people who work for Caritas recognise the value and worth of every human person, because to Caritas, development means the building up of the whole human family.

USEFUL WEBSITES:

www.caritas.org.au

Caritas Australia

www.thehungersite.com

The Hunger Site

www.forceten.org.au

Force Ten (this year with a special focus on water)

www.oneworld.net

One World

www.jubilee.org.au

Jubilee Australia

www.catholicmission.org.au

Catholic Mission

www.foodfirst.org

The Institute for Food & Development Policy



COLUMBAN MISSION

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